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“Trafficking in women and girls: Report of the Secretary General“ (A/RES/77/194)

The Republic of Serbia still, to a large extent, represents the country of origin, transit, but also the country of final destination for victims of human trafficking. In the period from 2017 to 2022, the Centre for Human Trafficking Victims' Protection had identified 320 victims of human trafficking (250 women, 70 men, including 150 children). Most of the identified victims are women (over 75.5%), mostly exposed to sexual exploitation, while almost half of the identified victims are children (around 40%). In addition, a total of 367 presumed victims of human trafficking have been registered in the same period. Citizens of the Republic of Serbia constitute the majority of officially identified victims of human trafficking (90%) and presumed victims (68%), most of whom are victims of internal trafficking (labour exploitation, forced begging, coercion to commit criminal offences and forced marriage). Women and child victims are exposed to multiple forms of exploitation, especially the members of the Roma community. There is also a new form of human trafficking that includes the exploitation of children for pornographic purposes. Foreign victims of human trafficking come from neighbouring countries (Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia), as well as from Asian and African countries, including Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nigeria, Cameroon, Mali and Congo. In recent years, the increasing presence of foreign workers (from Vietnam, China, India) is noticeable, which can lead to the risk of labour exploitation. Moreover, there has been an increase in the recruitment of victims via the Internet during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as an increase in cases of labour exploitation in the field of agriculture.

According to data of the Centre for Human Trafficking Victims' Protection for 2023, 66 victims of human trafficking have been formally identified, which represents an increase of 6.5% compared to 2022 (62), i.e. an increase of 43% compared to 2021. For the first time, sexual exploitation is not the most prevalent form of human trafficking. The most frequent form of human trafficking was forced begging with a share of 29.3% (in 2022: 12.9%), labour exploitation was the second most frequent form with 22.7% (in 2022: 6.4%), sexual exploitation was present in 20% of cases (in 2022: 55%, whereby 68% of such cases concerned women as victims), forced marriage in 14.7% (in 2022: 9.5%), and coercion to commit criminal offences in 13.3% of cases. Among the cases of multiple exploitation, a combination of labour exploitation and forced begging was most prevalent.

The distribution of cases with labour exploitation was the following: in 22% of cases it concerned work in industry, in 22.2% of cases it concerned work in the household, in 16.6% of cases it concerned work in agriculture, in 16.6% of cases it concerned work on the street, and in 22.2% of cases it concerned other forms of labour exploitations. Sexual exploitation in 87% of cases concerned commercial sexual exploitation, through coercion to provide sexual services in exchange for money, while in 13% of cases it concerned non-commercial sexual exploitation. In 45% of cases where the victims were coerced to commit criminal offences, they were forced to commit theft, in 18% of cases they had to participate in migrant smuggling, in 10% of cases they had to participate in drug dealing, while 27% of cases concerned other types of criminal offences. Exploitation for forced begging through coercion, which was present in 83% of cases, was carried out by the parents themselves or guardians of the victims. They were often the ones who sold the victims with the aim of marriage, in 73% of cases of forced marriages which were discovered.

The average age of identified victims in 2023 was 19.5, compared to 24.5 in 2022. The youngest victims were the victims of forced begging, while the highest average age was noted among the victims of labour exploitation. The average age of identified male victims of human trafficking was 22 years, while the average age of identified female victims of human trafficking was 18.5 years. The average age of the identified children was 12 years. At the time of exploitation, the youngest victim was not even one year old, while the oldest identified victim was 63 years old.

The percentage of children among the identified victims of human trafficking is one of the highest since the foundation of the Centre, and in 2023 it amounted to 62%. For comparison, the amount of children victims of human trafficking was 40% in 2022, and 37% in 2021. Children are most often exploited through forced begging, followed by sexual exploitation, coercion to commit criminal offences, forced marriages and labour exploitation. Especially vulnerable are children without parental guardianship, i.e. children who are accommodated at social welfare institutions (the exploitation did not take place at the institution itself).

When it comes to the education of child victims, during the period of exploitation, 50% of boys were attending school while 50% did not, while 38% of girls were attending while 62% did not. This is important information, because it indicates that a large number of children (44%) were exploited during the period when they attended school, which means that it is extremely important to include the education system as much as possible in the preliminary identification of victims. It is also important to mention that 15 children were not attending school at the time of exploitation, even though they were of primary school age, i.e. the age at which education is compulsory.

The gender structure has not changed significantly in recent years. The percentage of women among the identified victims of human trafficking is still extremely high, and amounted to 71% in 2023, which again indicates that this is a form of gender-based violence. They are most often victims of sexual exploitation and forced marriages, but are also affected by all other forms of human trafficking. The structure of the form of exploitation of men is different than in cases concerning women. Men are exploited through forced labour, forced begging or by coercion to commit criminal offences. We discovered cases of human trafficking most often in the exploitation phase or after it, and only in a handful of cases in the recruitment phase.

In the majority of cases, the exploitation had lasted for over 3 years, and then up to 3 months, which speaks of the importance of early detection of cases of human trafficking, i.e. that in situations where exploitation is not detected at the beginning, the risk of its prolonged duration significantly increases. The exploitation of children by their parents had lasted the longest. In these situations, the traffickers had a high degree of control over the victims, and it is particularly worrying that all this went unnoticed for years by institutions from different systems that worked with these families, which speaks of the need for further education of professionals who come into contact with children.

In most cases, the exploiters are persons who were previously known to the victims. These are their parents, partners, friends, acquaintances, relatives and employers, and only in a small percentage unknown persons. The high share of people from the immediate environment of the victims is even more pronounced when the victims are children. In these cases, parents almost always have a negative role, whether they recruited and/or exploited children, sold them to other people for exploitation, or put them in an additional vulnerable position through neglect or abuse and exposed them to exploitation.

Traffickers have recruited their victims in different ways, most often with job offers, pretending to be their friends, through courtship and marriage proposals. Job offers are most often used method of recruitment for labour exploitation – in 53% of cases. They were also used for recruitment with the aim of sexual exploitation – in 25% of cases. False friendship and courtship are the most common methods of

recruitment for sexual exploitation – in 31% and 25% of cases, respectively. Loans are also commonly used as a tool for recruiting victims, which are then suddenly increased without grounds and beyond the initial agreement by loan-sharking methods. This is how exploiters have recruited 33% of victims of coercion into committing criminal offences, and 12% of victims of sexual exploitation. The exploiters have most often recruited children by pretending to be their friends and by emotional manipulation, while adults were recruited through job offers.

The most common control mechanisms are the abuse of parental authority, threats and the use of physical violence. There are rare cases where the victims were locked up and tied up, but many had their freedom of movement restricted by confiscation of their passports. There are also frequent cases of using fake debt, and there were also situations in which traffickers abused the victim's disability, mostly intellectual disabilities. For blackmail, they used explicit videos and forced the victims to provide sexual services so that they would not be publicly disclosed or sent to their family members, while threats mostly concerned threatening to physically harm victims or their family members.

The abuse of various internet platforms and social networks is often used both for recruitment and exploitation of victims. Traffickers recruit victims through fake job advertisements or by courting them through various means of online communication. Later, most often in cases of sexual exploitation, they use social networks, but also websites for advertising, in order to promote the services provided by the victims. The use of these tools is ever increasing, whereby in 2022 they were observed in 25% of cases, while in 2023 they were observed in 39% of cases. Such tools are also used to a large extent during recruitment for labour exploitation, as well as for forced labour.

When it comes to socioeconomic status, the vast majority of identified victims are people without real estate, without employment and any regular income, most often with only basic education acquired. Slight differences between the genders were also noticed, whereby not a single woman among the identified victims had any income, nor a house or apartment, while two men had personal income, and the same number of them owned a house or apartment. These data refer to the period immediately before the start of exploitation. The largest percentage of victims of human trafficking among adults are persons who are not married or are in a common-law relationship and whose relationships with family members are dysfunctional. These people are particularly vulnerable because they are socially isolated and do not have support from their immediate community.

The normative framework in the Republic of Serbia provides a legal basis which enables work on prevention, timely identification, providing assistance and protection to victims, as well as suppression of human trafficking from the aspect of protection of human rights. A large number of international documents which are of immediate importance in the field of protection of victims and combating trafficking in human beings, especially in respect of women and children, have been accepted, including the instruments adopted under the auspices of the Council of Europe and the European Union.

Human trafficking is criminalized under the **Criminal Code**, by which the basic form of human trafficking is punishable by a prison sentence of 3 to 12 years, i.e. by a prison sentence of a minimum of 5 years if the offence was committed against a minor, without the possibility of imposing a prison sentence below the legal minimum. Also, according to the same Article of the said Code, a person who knows or could have known that a person is a victim of human trafficking, and therefore takes advantage of his/her position or enables another to take advantage of his/her position for the purpose of exploitation, can also be prosecuted. The aforementioned criminal offence of Human Trafficking was incorporated into the **Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence**, which is in accordance with the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings.

The improvement of the protection of victims of human trafficking during investigation and court proceedings is, to a large extent, strategically regulated through the implementation of the National Strategy on the rights of victims and witnesses of crime in the Republic of Serbia for the period 2020-2025. Procedural protection of victims of human trafficking includes informing the victims about their rights, the proceedings and course of proceedings in which they participate, about available services provided by the authorities which carry out criminal prosecution, as well as communication with the victims while being aware of the trauma they experienced as victims of the criminal offence of Human Trafficking. The criminal offence of Human Trafficking is under the jurisdiction of Higher Public Prosecutor's Offices and higher courts, as well as of the Public Prosecutor's Office for Organized Crime. According to the general mandatory instruction of the Public Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Serbia, the public prosecutors are designated as contact persons for the criminal offence of Human Trafficking and Trafficking in Minors for Adoption in all Higher and Appellate Public Prosecutor's Offices.

In the period 2017-2022, a total of 122 criminal charges were pressed against 241 perpetrators by the police officers of the Ministry of the Interior due to the commission of the criminal offence of Human Trafficking. In the same period, according to the annual reports of the Supreme Public Prosecutor's Office, a total of 89 defendants were convicted for committing the criminal offence of Human Trafficking by first-instance judgment.

The positive legislation of the Republic of Serbia provides for the right of the victims of human trafficking to compensation of damages, which can be achieved through criminal and civil proceedings. Deciding on property claims of victims in criminal proceedings is rare, and victims are instructed to exercise this right through civil proceedings. However, the number of victims of human trafficking who have received compensation of damages in Serbia in any way is negligible compared to the total number of victims. Property acquired by committing a criminal offence is rarely seized from the convicted persons, and even when such seizure occurs, the funds are usually not used to compensate the victims.

The Government of the Republic of Serbia implemented the **Strategy to prevent and suppress human trafficking, especially trafficking in women and children and to protect victims, for the period 2017 – 2022**. A significant number of measures related to trafficking in women, girls and children are an integral part of other planning documents related to different areas, whereby the following stand out: Strategy for Integrated Border Management, Gender Equality Strategy, Strategy for Preventing and Combating Gender-Based Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence, Strategy for the Social Inclusion of Roma Men and Women, Strategy for Youth, Strategy for Prevention and Protection Against Discrimination, Employment Strategy, Economic Migration Strategy, Information Society and Information Security Development Strategy, Strategy for the Development of the Public Information System, Strategy for Creating an Enabling Environment for the Development of Civil Society. The National Strategy on the rights of victims and witnesses of crime sets a specific objective No. 1: Establishing a network of support services for victims and witnesses of crime, while preserving and continuously improving the achieved standards of quality and availability of support services.

Programme for the fight against human trafficking in the Republic of Serbia for the period 2024-2029, which was adopted by the Government of the Republic of Serbia along with the accompanying Action Plan in March 2024, is a new cross-sectoral planning document whose general goal is to establish a comprehensive, coordinated and sustainable approach in the fight against human trafficking, through strengthening the system of prevention and criminal prosecution, while ensuring protection victims, especially in respect of women and children.

During the further implementation of already existing activities, as well as during the definition and implementation of newly directed measures and activities to achieve the changes envisaged by the

Programme for the fight against human trafficking, special attention was paid to the gender aspects of human trafficking, both as a criminal offence and as a social phenomenon, taking into account the special experiences and needs of women who have survived human trafficking, including child victims of human trafficking and children at risk. In this regard, four specific objectives of the Programme have been highlighted: Improved efficiency of criminal prosecution of perpetrators of the criminal offence of Human Trafficking while ensuring access to justice and procedural protection to victims of human trafficking, especially women and children, during criminal proceedings; Improved quality of protection of presumed victims and actual victims of human trafficking, especially women and children; Improved prevention of human trafficking through raising the awareness of the wider public, expert community and vulnerable groups about human trafficking and labour exploitation; Systemically strengthened cooperation at the local, national and international level for more efficient prevention and suppression of human trafficking.

The Programme was developed with the support of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and is based on the recommendations from the Report of the Council of Europe's Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA) within the third round of assessment of the Republic of Serbia's compliance with the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings and Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report of U.S. Department of State, including for 2023. Moreover, the Programme was created in accordance with the policies of the European Union in the field of combating human trafficking.

The complexity and multidisciplinary of human trafficking as a social phenomenon, along with the constant change in its forms and methods of execution, necessitated partnership and institutional cooperation at the national and international level, strategic and operational cooperation of state bodies, organizations and institutions with local self-government bodies, as well as partnership with Civil Society Organizations. Since 2021, the Protector of Citizens performs the duties of the **National Rapporteur on Trafficking in Human Beings** in accordance with the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings. **The Council for Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Human Beings**, as an expert advisory body of the Government of the Republic of Serbia, coordinates national and international activities for action against trafficking in human beings. Within the Ministry of the Interior, the responsibility for investigations in the field of trafficking in human beings is carried out by the Criminal Police Directorate, which has established the Department for the Suppression of Human Trafficking and Human Smuggling. Within this ministry, a special **Office for coordinating activities for combating trafficking in human beings** was also established, which is headed by the **National Anti-trafficking Coordinator**.

By applying the Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence from 2017, cooperation was improved by the establishment of the **Group for Coordination and Cooperation**, which consists of: Deputy Higher Public Prosecutor, police officer specialized in the fight against trafficking in human beings (member of one of the 27 local regional police teams formed to combat trafficking in human beings), representative of the Centre for Social Work (these members are in constant daily communication); representatives of the Centre for Human Trafficking Victims' Protection, as a social welfare institution that performs identification tasks and provides adequate assistance and support to victims of human trafficking with the aim of their recovery and reintegration, representatives of education, healthcare workers, representatives of the National Employment Service, representatives of Non-Governmental Organization "ASTRA", which is dedicated to suppressing all forms of trafficking in human beings and their exploitation, especially of women and children, effective search for missing children, as well as providing free legal assistance, Citizens' Association for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and all Forms of Gender-Based Violence "ATINA" (provides licensed housing services with support that includes accommodation and support for victims of trafficking in human beings in the reintegration process, runs a programme of their economic empowerment, provides psychological counselling and free legal aid), as well as other

representatives of associations and individuals who provide protection and support to victims of trafficking in human beings.

The Group for Coordination and Cooperation in the aforementioned composition holds meetings at least once every 15 days, i.e. as needed and depending on the number of pressed criminal charges for the criminal offence of Human Trafficking, at which individual cases are reviewed, an individual plan of support and protection for the victim is drafted, which contains complete and effective protection and support measures for the victim, as well as for other members of the victim's family who need support. The individual protection and support plan for victims provides assistance that can ensure appropriate and safe accommodation, psychological and material assistance, access to emergency medical care, access to education for children, legal access to the labour market, professional training and education.

The Centre for Human Trafficking Victims' Protection was established in 2012 based on the Decree on the Network of Social Welfare Institutions. The Centre performs its activities within two organizational units - the Service for Coordination of Human Trafficking Victims' Protection and the Shelter for Victims of Human Trafficking. Professional workers of the Centre carry out formal identification of victims of trafficking in human beings independently from criminal prosecution, based on reports received from various institutions, organizations and individuals. In this way, the victims are guaranteed access to protection that is not conditioned by cooperation with criminal prosecution authorities. All presumed victims of trafficking in human beings, i.e. persons in respect of whom the procedure of formal identification has been initiated, have access to all rights and services to which formally identified victims are entitled. Also, the Centre, in cooperation with relevant entities, Centers for Social Work and Civil Society Organizations, with the mandatory participation of victims, draws up individual service and protection plans for victims of trafficking in human beings, monitors the implementation of service and protection plans and the outcomes of protection and support provided to the victims, and coordinates the activities of providing social welfare services to the victims of trafficking in human beings. The Centre also provides emergency accommodation services for female victims of trafficking in human beings, who are over 16 years of age and to their children.

Professional workers of the Centre are also in charge of coordinating the protection in all active cases, which includes victims of trafficking in human beings who were identified in previous years, and who still need help and support.

The largest number of reports citing suspicion that a person is a victim of trafficking in human beings are filed by the police, followed by Civil Society Organizations, the social welfare system, as well as by international organizations and other foreign organizations, inspection services, the education system and the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration. Sometimes the victim of trafficking in human beings itself or its family files the report, and in rare situations the report is filed by the Centre itself. Special indicators for the preliminary identification of children and adults as victims of trafficking in human beings have been developed for the police, the social welfare system, the education system, and the healthcare system. Also, trainings were conducted for the application of the aforementioned indicators.

Over the years, the participation of Centers for Social Work and institutions from the social welfare system in the preliminary identification of victims of trafficking in human beings has not been at a satisfactory level, bearing in mind the fact that a significant number of victims were on the records of the Centers for Social Work as beneficiaries of social welfare services before they fell victim to the chain of trafficking in human beings. Professional workers of Homes for children and youth without parental care were insufficiently trained to recognize and react in situations of recruitment of their wards for trafficking in human beings. To this end, in 2021, the Centre had developed indicators for the formal identification of victims of trafficking in human beings, which include indicators of labour exploitation for children and

adults, indicators of sexual exploitation for children and adults, indicators of forced begging for children, indicators of child marriage, indicators of slavery, similar positions slavery and servitude for children, indicators of illegal adoption, indicators of coercion to commit criminal offences for children and adults, indicators of organ trafficking, indicators of trafficking in human beings for use in armed conflicts, as well as indicators for expert assessment of violence against children and adults, and indicators for expert assessment of risk factors and strengths in respect of children and adults.

Also, in order to improve the proactive system for detecting cases of trafficking in human beings, from November 2021, the Guidelines on how the employees of the Ministry of the Interior should act in cases of trafficking in human beings, with indicators for the preliminary identification of victims of trafficking in human beings for the police, and an information booklet on the rights of victims of trafficking in human beings and available forms of support, are being applied and are available in 16 languages. Moreover, a national free-of-charge hotline for reporting suspected trafficking in human beings (0800 100 388) was established.

The identification of potential victims of trafficking in human beings in the migrant population remains a special challenge, especially in respect of persons who travel using the services of smugglers or who are forced to participate in smuggling themselves. The length of stay of migrants in our country has been shortened in recent years, which is why the Centre is often unable to carry out the identification procedure, while the competences and procedures for identifying persons at risk of trafficking in human beings should be further strengthened and continuously adapted to the needs observed in field work. In order to improve the efficiency in the identification of victims of trafficking in human beings among migrants, the principle of special urgency in identification was introduced and a special expert was appointed to monitor these cases and organize the identification. As a result, 6 victims, each from the migrant population, have been identified in 2022 and 2023, as opposed to only 1 identified victim in 2021.

During 2023, a total of 168 new reports of suspected trafficking in human beings were received, which is the highest number in the last 5 years and represents an increase of 22% compared to 2022, which leads to a greater number of people who require aid. Out of the total number of reports, the identification procedure was initiated for 137 cases, of which 66 persons were formally identified as victims of trafficking in human beings. The total number of victims of trafficking in human beings who are beneficiaries of the Centre, and to whom it provided support, is 373; support was additionally provided to 70 persons at risk of trafficking in human beings, while in 237 cases these were the victims of trafficking in human beings who were identified in previous years. A total of 15 accommodations were made at the Shelter for victims of trafficking in human beings, which is the largest number since the establishment of this service in 2019.

In situations where, based on the conducted identification procedure, it cannot be established that a person is indeed a victim of trafficking in human beings, it is most often a case of some other form of abuse, i.e. a victim of some other criminal offence. In the course of 2023, 35% of such cases involved the neglect of children who spent time on the street, among other things, by begging, 29% involved child marriages, which also include abuse and neglect, while the rest of the cases concerned sexual abuse, cohabitation with a minor, domestic violence and prostitution. In such situations, professional workers also compile reports and send them to competent institutions.

The problem of **trafficking in human beings for the purpose of labour exploitation** in the Republic of Serbia has been recognized in previous years, and so far numerous activities aimed at building the knowledge and skills of labour inspectors, but also of other entities that may have jurisdiction in recognizing and solving specific cases, have been implemented. In the period 2017-2022, a total of 46 victims of trafficking in human beings for the purpose of labour exploitation have been identified. The identified victims were mostly citizens of Serbia who found themselves in a situation of exploitation

through labour migration. In recent years, a large number of foreign workers have been coming to work in Serbia under various arrangements. According to the data of the National Employment Service, during 2022, a total of 35,805 foreigners resided in the country on the grounds of work, which represents an increase of 72% compared to 2021. In 2023, more than 52,000 work permits were issued to foreign nationals - by gender, of the total number of work permits, approximately 80% were for male applicants. The assumption is that the number of foreigners who reside in the country on the grounds of work is higher than what the official figures tell us, given that it is estimated that in many cases foreign nationals work without a work permit. Although there is no official record of what jobs they most often perform, foreign nationals are mostly seen in our country on construction sites, fruit and vegetable plantations, and in fast food establishments. Of importance for this area is the entry into force of the Law on Amendments to the Law on Employment of Foreigners of 1 February 2024 and the Law on Amendments to the Law on Foreigners, which bring numerous novelties in the current practice of foreigner employment.

For each identified victim of human trafficking, the Centre for Human Trafficking Victims' Protection creates an individual protection plan in which representatives of social welfare institutions, healthcare and educational institutions, police, and citizens' associations are involved. Each plan is developed in cooperation with the beneficiaries. The services and protection refer to the following areas:

- The safety of women beneficiaries, which includes the activities of close cooperation with the police, their regular alarming and advisory work with women beneficiaries, along with the creation of safety strategies.
- Access to justice, which includes a wide range of activities – hiring a lawyer, preparing for giving a testimony, requesting the status of a particularly vulnerable witness, submitting findings and opinions to Public Prosecutors' Offices and courts, with a detailed description and interpretation of the situation concerning trafficking in human beings, organizing transportation and escort for victims when going to Public Prosecutors' Offices and courts.
- Health care, which includes assistance in exercising the right to health insurance, scheduling medical examinations and interventions, procurement of medicines, organization of transportation and escort when visiting the physician.
- Support in overcoming trauma is provided through counselling work by our professional workers, as well as through psychotherapy services, which are provided directly by the Centre or other organizations or institutions, most often by specialized Non-Governmental Organizations.
- Ensuring material security is mainly done through cooperation with other institutions which can provide different types of material support, such as Centers for Social Work, Red Cross or other humanitarian organizations.
- Accommodation is most often provided by accommodation at the Shelter of the Centre for Human Trafficking Victims' Protection or in other social welfare institutions. Most often, victims use accommodation services at the Shelter of the Centre, a housing service with support provided by the NGO "Atina", and to a lesser extent at safe houses, homes for children and youth without parental care and foster families.
- Support in family functioning means working with victims' families, which aims to aid their functioning, reintegrate the victim into the family, mobilize their capacities in order to support the victim, strengthen the victim's parental capacities or the capacities of the victim's parents, as well as to improve partnership relations.
- Provision of guardianship protection is in the domain of guardianship authorities, with whom the Centre for Human Trafficking Victims' Protection closely cooperates and provides them with aid and support, and coordinates their cooperation with other institutions and organizations. In cases where the presumed or identified victim is a minor, we immediately inform the Center for Social Work and together with them create a protection plan for the beneficiary.

Specialized accommodation for male victims of trafficking in human beings does not exist, with accommodation being organized in an alternative way according to the needs. Services for victims of trafficking in human beings, especially when it comes to certain types of exploitation and special needs of victims, and services related to reintegration, are not developed and available on a sufficient scale.

The criminal landscape of trafficking in human beings has changed significantly with the increasing availability of technology and access to the Internet and social networks. Traffickers use technology to recruit, exploit and control victims without ever being anywhere near where the crime was committed. It has become more difficult to detect and investigate trafficking in human beings, prosecute the traffickers, and assist the victims. In order to tackle these challenges head-on, law enforcement authorities and legal experts involved in combating trafficking in human beings in Serbia need to build their knowledge and capacities and improve their cooperation to be able to deal with cases of trafficking in human beings that take place through the medium of technology.

As a result of the developed professional materials and a series of activities to build professional capacities for combating trafficking in human beings over the past two years, the number of reports of potential victims of child trafficking filed by schools has increased tenfold. Various materials and support provided by the project continuously facilitate the work on identifying and providing assistance to potential victims of trafficking in human beings in schools.

Since 2017, the National Contact Centre for Child Safety on the Internet has been established as an institutional mechanism that deals with the prevention and response to the endangerment of children in the digital environment, which also includes trafficking in human beings, i.e. in children. The National Contact Centre accepts applications online through the platform www.pametnoibezbedno.gov.rs and via phone number 19833. The National Contact Centre for Child Safety on the Internet organizes presentations on Internet safety in schools throughout the Republic of Serbia, for teachers, parents and children alike.

The National platform for the prevention of violence that involves children "I protect you" (cuvajte.gov.rs) was established in 2021 as the first national platform for all issues of protection and prevention of various types of violence involving children. The platform was established with the aim of synergizing the actions of ministries, representative trade unions in education and Civil Society Organizations. On the National Platform "I protect you", there are trainings for employees, parents and students related to the prevention of trafficking in human beings and digital violence.

The "Find Me" platform, i.e. the system for urgent public notification in the event of a missing minor, has been active in Serbia since October 2023. Activating the system enables the rapid distribution of information to all citizens of Serbia, when the police assess that publishing this information to the public would contribute to finding the child. Urgent notification involves sending a message about the disappearance of a minor with all relevant information, by interrupting TV and radio broadcasts, sending an SMS message to all citizens through their mobile operators, displays on screens on highways, airports, railway and bus stations.

International cooperation is also intensive, especially international operational police cooperation, but also the exchange of knowledge, experiences and examples of good practices through participation in expert meetings and trainings. At the end of 2019, the Republic of Serbia had signed an Agreement with Eurojust, and through this cooperation participates in joint investigative teams with other Member States. International cooperation at the operational level with Interpol, Europol and SELEC takes place through the Ministry of the Interior.